

## Book reviews

### Legal Aspects of Medical and Nursing Service

(Third edition)  
Michael Whincup  
Beckenham, Ravenswood Publications,  
1982  
£12.50

Legal aspects of medical and nursing service are in urgent need of discussion and clarification and this book makes a unique and useful contribution. It is unique in its references to judgments of individual court cases which readers can pursue further. It is useful in explaining the sources of the law and in its comprehensive and up-to-date inclusion of statutes, showing their relevance to the many specific problems which concern health service staff. This is the third edition of the book, which is evidence of its appeal. It is divided into two main parts, the first dealing with the rights and duties in employment and the second with medicine and the law. Topics discussed in Part I include employment contracts, dismissal, redundancy, employees' protection - all topical and important issues. Part II includes discussions of medical negligence, liabilities to the public, confidentiality and disciplinary proceedings.

In the preface it is claimed that the book 'provides a clear account of their (the medical and nursing professions') legal rights and duties which will "help them to do their work correctly and with confidence".' This claim is not justified, largely because of the complexity and ambiguity of the law but also because of the author's presentation. Although the frequent interjection of references to previous court judgments adds interest and reality to otherwise theoretical and abstract subject matter, it tends to interrupt the development of the individual problems and the flow of the arguments surrounding them.

Attempts to use the book as an aid to teaching or as a guide to individual action are not readily rewarded by success. Occasionally, obscurity and confusion are increased rather than dispelled - which is not necessarily the author's fault. However, some statements are misleading, if not untrue. For example, in the otherwise useful discussion of security of employment and the fundamental question 'Who is an employee?', it is stated that, as far as staff on the premises of doctors in general practice are concerned, the doctors are employers with all the burdens and responsibilities of this status. Yet nursing staff working within general medical practice and on the doctor's premises are most frequently health authority employees and it is precisely this fact which raises important legal and ethical problems.

The above critical comments are not intended to detract from the value of the book. It is a mammoth work, it raises many extremely important issues, handling them helpfully and sensitively and it increases the reader's awareness and knowledge of the legal and ethical maze surrounding the professional practice of health professionals. The book's inescapable destiny lies in the need for frequent up-dating if its usefulness is to be maintained.

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### Deciphering Sociological Research

Gerry Rose  
London, Macmillan, 1982  
£10.00 hardback, £3.50 paperback

This book is addressed primarily to undergraduate students in sociology

but its objectives may make it of interest to a wider constituency of research consumers. Essentially, it is intended to guide the reader in the skills of interpreting and evaluating published accounts of sociological research. As such, it might well be considered for a place on methodology courses for users of sociologists' research techniques in community medicine, nursing or social work. About half of the book is devoted to exegesis while the remainder reprints, in abbreviated form, 12 journal articles which serve as case studies for the author's proposed techniques.

It must be said, however, that the objectives are somewhat imperfectly realised, largely because of a clash between the grand scale of the author's ambition and the restricted compass of his text. One has the recurrent feeling of a valuable lecture course lying behind a book which is so condensed as to be irritatingly superficial.

The volume works best on what seems to be the author's native territory of quantitative research. This is an area where there is a much clearer consensus on the framing of research debates and where there are more established criteria for distinguishing adequate and inadequate work. The greatest weakness lies in the two chapters on field or qualitative research where the literature discussed is comparatively old and the author has no grasp of the constructive impact of ethnomethodology, especially in the UK. A one-paragraph dismissal is simply inadequate where significant methodological advances have been occurring as a direct response to the ethnomethodologists' forceful critique of traditional practice. There is, too, a conspicuous absence of reference to conversation analysis, a growing point in UK research.

This would have been a much more valuable book if the author had confined himself to discussing quantitative research and taken advantage of the extra elbow room to give it a more dis-